



A Confederation of the Salish,
Pend d' Oreille
and Kootenai Tribes

THE CONFEDERATED SALISH AND KOOTENAI TRIBES
OF THE FLATHEAD NATION

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A People of Vision

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July 6, 2016

Richard Oppen, Director
Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services
P.O. Box 4210
Helena, MT 59620

Re: American Indian Youth Suicide Prevention approach

Dear Director Oppen:

The Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribal Health Department has been engaged in Governor Bullock's effort to engage in the prevention of suicide among American Indian youth in Montana. I personally visited with him in October 2014 as he was making decisions about his budget and spoke of a recent suicide that had occurred in our tribal community. He expressed his heartfelt concern about this devastating issue affecting our tribal families and communities. As a result, funding was included in the Governor's budget he submitted to the 2015 Montana Legislature.

Upon receiving the appropriation from the Legislature, the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS) engaged CSKT Tribal Health on a number of occasions to consult and seek our advice on the expenditure of the funding. This included a visit to the CSKT Tribal Council and discussions with Tribal Health staff. I personally attended the formal consultation conducted by DPHHS, along with two tribal member youth. They spoke eloquently about the need to learn more about why so many in their generation die young. Their words still resonant within me.

While there was no consensus, as is common in Indian Country, I support the approach DPHHS has decided to take. I look forward to gaining additional information and best practice approaches. Once the information is gathered specific to Montana, collective decisions and programming can occur, with the intent to improve the lives of those we serve.

Sincerely,

S. Kevin Howlett,
Department Head